Judaism and the church in Paul's thought

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ABSTRACT
This essay distinguishes between the ways in which Paul affirms and the ways in which he denies justification through works of the Law. Such a distinction makes it possible to recognise a positive attitude towards the Law and Judaism as consistent with Paul's thinking, which can provide the church with a better understanding of Judaism, but also contribute to a new self-understanding of the church by incorporating those aspects of Judaism and justification through works of the Law which Paul evaluates as indispensable for faith.

1 INTRODUCTION
Paul's radical negation of justification through works of the Law, with which Judaism is closely associated, has contributed to the sharp gulf which has existed between Judaism and the church since the beginnings of Christianity. What I will argue in this essay is that this had not been Paul's intention, even if his own formulations contributed to this (mis)understanding. Paul's problem is that he was unable to distinguish between the sense in which he rejected justification through works of the Law and the sense in which he affirmed it. This led to well-known contradictions, such as, between Galatians 3:21cd, 'if a Law with the power to make alive was given, justification would indeed have been through the Law,' which denies the Law the power to make alive, and Romans 2:7, according to which 'those who, with the patience of good works, seek glory and honor and immortality' will receive 'life eternal,' not just life.

The main task for this essay will be to distinguish between the ways in which Paul affirms and the ways in which he denies justification through works of the Law. Such a distinction will make it possible to recognise a positive attitude towards the Law and Judaism as consistent with Paul's thinking, which can provide the church with a better understanding of Judaism. It will also contribute to a new self-understanding of the church by incorporating those aspects of Judaism and justification through works of the Law which Paul evaluates as indispensable for faith.

Romans 2 is probably Paul's most unambiguous affirmation of justification through works of the Law, which has led to a history of attempts to interpret away this central feature of the chapter. With regard to our topic it
is important to note that in Rm 2 Paul uses justification through works of the Law as a polemic against Jewish reliance on a privileged relationship with God, making a clear distinction between obedience to the Law and the claim to Jewish privilege. It is a distinction which Paul had already made in 1 Cor 7:19 in his interpretation of the distinction between Jews and gentiles as irrelevant in relationship to keeping the Law: ‘Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.’ What is not always recognised is that Paul does not only say that being circumcised is nothing, but that the alternative to it is also nothing. Paul’s only choice is for those who keep the commandments of God. In Rm 2 he argues the same point more extensively. One side of the 1 Cor 7:19 equation, ‘circumcision is nothing,’ can be found in Rm 2:13, ‘Not the hearers of the Law [the semantic equivalent of being circumcised] are just before God, but the doers of the Law [those who keep the commandments of God] will be justified.’ In 2:25-26 Paul restates both sides of the equation: ‘Circumcision is useful if you practice the Law; if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become no circumcision. So, if an uncircumcised person observes the just requirements of the Law, will his [or her] lack of circumcision not be considered circumcision?’

2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE GODLY

It is important to note that in contrast with Rm 4:5, according to which Abraham believed in the god who justifies the ungodly, the uncircumcised, in Phlp 3:2-11 and Gl 2:14-16 Paul’s reasoning concerns justification by faith of the godly (the Jews), not the ungodly (gentiles or sinners). In Phlp 3:9 the justification ‘from God’ through the faith of Christ, which stands opposed to Paul’s own justification ‘from the Law’ (‘in the Law’ according to verse 6), is clearly not of a sinner, but of someone who is righteous before the Law, someone godly, an unblemished Jew, that is, Paul himself. The virtues he claims for himself, including that ‘with regard to justification in the Law [he was] unblemished,’ qualify him as a perfect Jew: ‘Circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew from the Hebrews, with regard to the Law a Pharisee, with regard to zeal, a persecutor of the Church, with regard to the justification which is in the Law, unblemished’ (Phlp 3:5-6). It is from the standpoint of his godliness, his εὐσεβείας, not ungodliness, ἀσεβείας, as in the case of Abraham in Rm 4:5, that he concludes, ‘What was gain for me, that I considered a loss through [what I gained in] Christ’ (Phlp 3:7).

The piety of the Jew which Paul rejects for the sake of justification through the faith of Christ in Phlp 3:7-9 is described in greater depth by Josephus: ‘All the practices and discussions and sayings; all have as their
objective the godliness (εὐσεβεία) which [we have] before our God’ (Contra Apion 2.171). There is no hint at works of righteousness here but of devotion to God. For Josephus, righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and all the other virtues do not have meaning in themselves, but are expressions of piety before God: ‘[Our lawgiver] did not make godliness (εὐσεβεία) a part of character (ἀρετή), but the latter part of the former; I mean justice, prudence, endurance, the harmony of all citizens towards each other in everything’ (Contra Apion 2.170). Paul affirms a similar kind of piety in Phlp 3:5-6, but according to verses 7-9, he could no longer maintain it ‘before God’ (contra Josephus) when he compares it with what he found in Christ.

In Gl 2:15-16, Paul assumes an understanding of the justification of the godly similar to that which he described in Phlp 3:5-9: ‘We who are by heritage Jews, and not from the gentiles, sinners, knowing that a person is not justified from works of the Law unless it is through the faith of Jesus Christ, we too believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified from the faith of Christ and not from works of the Law, because from works of the Law none will be justified.’ The distinction between ‘we Jews’ and the gentiles in verse 15 is the distinction between the godly (Jews) and the ungodly (gentiles). The qualification ‘from works of the Law’ identifies the Jew, and εἰκόνων should be translated literally ‘if not,’ ‘unless,’ and not dogmatically ‘but,’ which has become the standard translation even though it has no literal basis in the text.\(^1\) Paul’s meaning is that ‘we Jews,’ that is, we who are godly, not like the gentiles, ungodly, we too know that Jewish godliness is not the means of justification, that we too will not be justified unless it is through the faith of Jesus Christ. As he will state explicitly in Rm 4:12, Abraham became ‘the father of the circumcised for those who are not only circumcised, but who also trace the footsteps of the faith while uncircumcised of our father Abraham,’ so here too Jewish godliness is not contrary to justification by faith. What Paul stated specifically about himself in Phlp 3:5-9, he formulates as a general principle in Gl 2:16. In both cases we

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\(^1\) Translation of the phrase εἰκόνων in Gl 2:16 literally with ‘if not, unless’ can function as a key to an interpretation of justification by faith in Paul which no longer places justification through works of the Law and justification by faith in an exclusive relationship to each other, but one in which justification through works of the Law, that is, justification as a Jew, is included in justification by faith, as Paul states explicitly in Rm 4:12, [Abraham became] the father of the circumcised for those who are not only circumcised, but who also trace the footsteps of the faith while uncircumcised of our father Abraham.’ If this obvious translation of εἰκόνων is accepted, the interpretation of Paul’s teaching concerning justification by faith in the rest of the Philippians fragment, Galatians and Romans, in the sense stated above, becomes inevitable—and falls into place.
have a justification of the godly, the Jew, not the ungodly, the gentile, by faith. It is the first side of the equation in 1 Cor 7:19, 'circumcision is nothing.'

3 JUSTIFICATION BY VIRTUE OF BEING A JEW AND JUSTIFICATION THROUGH OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW

Two aspects of being justified 'from works of the Law' should be distinguished, even though they are inseparable in Paul's mind: (i) Justification by virtue of being a Jew, signified by doing everything that is required by the Law to qualify as a Jew, which Paul described himself as having done in Phil 3:5-6. (ii) Justification for living a life in obedience to the Law as described by Josephus in Contra Apion 2.171. Both aspects are involved in what distinguishes a Jew from a gentile, but Paul's focus is more on the latter in Gal 2:15, 'We who are by heritage Jews and not from the gentiles, sinners,' as his accusation of Peter in the previous verse makes clear, 'You as a Jew live like a gentile, and not like a Jew' (Gal 2:14c). Living like a Jew is the positive religious-ethical quality which Paul denies Peter. When Paul negates Jewish exclusiveness, however, most explicitly in Rom 3:29, 'Or is God of the Jews only? Not also of the gentiles? Indeed, also of the gentiles,' it is justification by virtue of being a Jew which he has primarily in mind. His own formulation of a Jewish identity in Phil 3:5-6 compared with Josephus' formulation in Contra Apion 2.171 is significant. It is inconceivable that he would have considered as 'refuse in order to gain Christ' (Phil 3:8c) what Josephus described as a fundamental constituent of Jewish identity. To the contrary, that is what he considered to have now become possible also for gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Paul had an extreme contempt for gentiles; for him they represented a morality the exact opposite of that of the Jews, expressed, for example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:5, where he encourages his gentile readers to sexual behavior 'not in lust like the gentiles who do not know God,' as if his readers are not or no longer gentiles. Rom 1:18-31, notwithstanding its rhetorical function to deny Jewish privilege in the structure of Rom 1:18-4:25, is clear testimony of his detestation of gentile perversion. Even though he opposed Judaising the gentiles by having them circumcised, he himself adhered to a form of moral Judaising; gentile believers were no longer gentile, 'You remember, when you were gentiles you went off as you were led to the dumb idols' (1 Cor 12:2), and in Rom 6:19b he contrasts the previous 'lawless' life of his gentile readers with the kind of life he holds before them now that they have become united in Christ: 'As you offered your limbs to be slaves of impurity and lawlessness for the sake of lawlessness, so now offer your limbs as slaves to justice for the sake of sanctification.' Believers, Jewish as well as gentile,
are not subject to the Law, and yet Paul describes as the objective of life in Christ ‘that the just requirement of the Law will be fulfilled in us who do not live in accordance with the flesh, but in accordance with the spirit’ (Rm 8:4). Justification of the gentile, of the ungodly, did not mean for Paul continuation in a gentile way of life, but access to a godliness truly worthy of a Jew, something he claimed to be possible for gentiles in general in Rm 2:25-29.

Only once, in Romans 2, does Paul reveal awareness of the distinction between justification by virtue of being a Jew and justification by living in obedience to the Law: ‘Not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified’ (2:13), and, ‘If an uncircumcised person observes the just requirements of the Law, will his [or her] lack of circumcision not be considered circumcision?’ (2:26). Being circumcised, being a Jew, is defined here not in terms of privilege, but, to the contrary, in the sense of the godliness described by Josephus, the sense in which Paul admonishes his gentile readers in Rm 6:19bc, ‘As you offered your limbs to be slaves of impurity and lawlessness for the sake of lawlessness, so now offer your limbs as slaves to justice for the sake of sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from justice.’ Where he obviously goes beyond Josephus’ statement is that he does not confine such godliness to Jews, believing that through Christ it had become a possibility also for gentiles. One should, however, consider the possibility that even at the time when he persecuted the church as a zealous Pharisee, Paul had not been quite able to suppress the suspicion that the distinction between Jewish godliness and gentile ungodliness was not as neat as he would have liked to think, and that this suspicion remained a factor in his experience of Christ. Such an attitude towards gentiles was not unique in Paul, but also true of Philo.2

4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE UNGODLY

Paul presents the other side of the equation, ‘not being circumcised is nothing,’ in Rm 4:2-10 when he presents Abraham as a sinner, a gentile, who trusted the god who justifies the ungodly, the gentile, and so was justified by faith. In connection with the justification of Abraham, Paul sharpens his attack on the meaning of circumcision by denying the view expressed by Josephus that Jewish godliness which becomes manifest through the practice of all the virtues counts ‘before God.’ In Rm 4:2 Paul states, ‘If Abraham was justified through works, he would have reason to be proud, but not before God.’ The reason for Paul’s qualification that Abraham’s hypothetical pride

2 Cf, for example, Philo, De Virtutibus 175-82.
in the achievement of justification through works does not count before God becomes clear in 4:5. Paul's concern in this section of Rm 4 is not justification through works as such. His denial of justification through works before God is a step in his argument to prove that Abraham had been justified, not as a Jew, but as a gentile, an ungodly person. As a gentile, a person 'who did not work' (4:5a), who did not have actions signifying his 'godliness before our God' (Josephus, Contra Apion 2.171), Abraham trusted 'the one who justifies the ungodly,' that is, the gentile (4:5b), and on the basis of that faith, he was justified (4:5c). Paul presents Abraham in a situation similar to that of the publican in Luke's story of the Publican and the Pharisee in the Temple (Lk 18:10-14). The publican, even though by heritage a Jew, through his assumed immoral activities as a publican, had become equivalent to a gentile. Nevertheless, because of his trust in God he 'went home justified rather than [the Pharisee]' (Lk 18:14b). In contrast with Abraham, Paul had been able to claim for himself godliness similar to that of the Pharisee (Phlp 3:5-6), or what Josephus proudly announces as the Jewish attitude towards the virtues in Contra Apion 2.171.

The point of Paul's reasoning in Rm 4:6-8, proving from the Psalms that Abraham had been a sinner, is not Abraham's sinfulness as such, but Abraham's sinfulness as proof of his gentile identity, as verses 9-10 make clear, 'This blessing, then, was it on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? For we say, faith was reckoned to Abraham as justification. How was it reckoned? When he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not circumcised but uncircumcised.' What Paul says by means of the quotations from the Psalms could apply to anyone, but that is not his point. He has in mind specifically Abraham. In Rm 4:6-10, Abraham represents the direct opposite of what Paul claims for himself as a model Jew in Phlp 3:5-6, and what he attributes as misguided Jewish confidence to Peter and the others in Gl 2:15-16. In none of these cases is sin a primary concern. Paul points to having been unblemished with regard to justification through the Law as evidence that he had been an exemplary Jew; in a similar way, by proving from Scripture that Abraham had been sinful (Rm 4:6-8), he provides evidence that Abraham had been a gentile when he was justified. The issue is not sinfulness as such, but godliness as the mark of the Jew, and godlessness as the mark of the gentile, both of whom, according to Paul, through his new understanding in Christ, are justified by faith.

5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE GODLY AND THE UNGODLY

In Rm 4:2-12 Paul reaffirms both sides of the equation of 1 Cor 7:19. First, 'circumcision is nothing' in 4:2, 'if Abraham was justified from works, he would have reason to be proud, but not before God,' and then, 'not being
circumcised is nothing' in 4:5, 'for the person who does not work, but trusts in him who justifies the ungodly, his [or her] trust is reckoned as justice.' He then formulates both sides positively in the inverse order in 4:11c-12 with the statement that Abraham became the father of gentiles as well as Jews through a shared faith in which being either uncircumcised or circumcised count for nothing, 'so that he would be the father of all who believe while uncircumcised, that [justification] would be reckoned to them, and the father of the circumcised for those who are not only circumcised, but who also trace the footsteps of the faith while uncircumcised of our father Abraham.'

Unlike 1 Cor 7:19, however, Rm 4:2-12 asserts that what counts is not 'keeping the commandments of God,' but 'believing in the one who justifies the ungodly' (v 5b). The same applies to Phlp 3:5-9 and Gl 2:15-16. In this emphasis on justification by faith, without works lies the difference between these three passages, Phlp 3:5-9, Gl 2:15-16, and Rm 4:2-12, on the one hand, and 1 Cor 7:19 and Romans 2, on the other. In the first three passages there is no distinction between Jews and gentiles, between the godly and the ungodly, with regard to justification by faith. In Rm 3:22b, Paul makes this explicit: 'There is no distinction.' The same applies to 1 Cor 7:19 and Romans 2, except that in these two passages it is with regard to keeping the commandments that there is also no distinction, as Paul states explicitly in Rm 2:11, 'there is no favoritism with God.' Thus Paul argues in Romans 2 that the distinction between the godly and the ungodly is not equivalent to the distinction between Jews and gentiles, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. And, contrary to Rm 4:2, the uncircumcised who keeps 'the just requirements of the Law' (2:26a), who is 'in secret a Jew' (2:29a), will receive praise 'not from human beings, but from God' (2:29c), which agrees with Josephus' concept of 'the godliness which [we have] before our God,' except that Paul argues in Romans 2 that such godliness is not limited to the Jews.

6 CONTRADICTIONS IN PAUL

Paul's statements in Romans 2 that the gentile who keeps 'the just requirements of the Law' (2:26a) will receive praise 'not from human beings, but from God' (2:29c)—and others in Romans 2 like it—are contradicted in a kind of literary-chronological chiasm by Gl 3:11-12 and 3:21cd, which precede it chronologically, and Rm 4:2, which follows it. The negative statement about the Law in Gl 3:19-20 brought Paul to the point where he finds it necessary to ask, 'is the Law thus against the promises?' which he negates: 'by no means!' (3:21ab). What is more important for us here is the motivation for his reply, 'if a Law with the power to make alive was given, justification would indeed have been through the Law' (Gl 3:21cd). Even as Paul comes to the defense of the Law, he denies that it has ultimate value. The
Law does not have the power that leads to life. This is contradicted by Rm 2:7, according to which ‘those who, with the patience of good works, seek glory and honour and immortality’ will receive ‘life eternal,’ not just life, but eternal life. Contrary to Gl 3:21, doing what the Law requires in an almost Josephian sense is rewarded with eternal life. It is in that same sense that Paul concludes in Romans 2 that the gentile who keeps ‘the just requirements of the Law’ (2:26a) will receive praise, ‘not from human beings, but from God’ (2:29c).

But then, in turn, Paul again contradicts statements such as these in Romans 2 with the statement in Rm 4:2 that, ‘if Abraham was justified from works, he would have reason to be proud, but not before God.’ As in Gl 2:29, Paul here too reveals ambivalence about the Law, on the one hand affirming it, ‘if Abraham was justified from works, he would have reason to be proud,’ but then turning against it, ‘not before God.’ Romans 2 thus appears to be contradicted in one way by Gl 3:21 and supported in another way by Rm 4:2.

To add to this apparent confusion, 1 Cor 7:19, in turn, supports what Paul wrote in Romans 2, ‘Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.’ If keeping the commandments of God is affirmed as what is important, as opposed to being circumcised and not being circumcised, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that keeping the commandments of God deserve ‘praise, not from human beings, but from God’ (Rm 2:29c).

These contradictions constitute one of the most fundamental problems in the interpretation of Paul. The question can no longer be whether Paul makes contradictory statements, but how it was possible for him to do so. That is the Gordian knot that needs to be untied, I hope not by cutting it through, like Alexander, but allowing it to unravel.

A question one might consider is whether 1 Cor 7:19 adequately expresses a fundamental Pauline conviction, whether his conviction about the Law and the commandments did not find more accurate expression in the statements that contradict it, as in Gl 3:11-12, 3:21 and Rm 4:2. However, in the latter case, why did Paul reaffirm the teaching in 1 Cor 7:19 so extensively in Rm 2? The coordinates 1 Cor 7:19 and Romans 2 which contradict the traditional understanding of Paul suggest as a possible approach that we investigate what Paul meant by the statements that appear to contradict them, Rm 4:2 and Gl 3:11-12, 3:21.

6.1 Romans 4:2

The qualification oυ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ‘not before God,’ in Rm 4:2 may provide a clue to what is at issue. The phrase appears as an afterthought. Without it, the beginning of that verse, ‘if Abraham was justified from works, he would
have reason to be proud,' affirms what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 7:19 and Romans 2. He reaffirms it in Rm 4:4, 'For the person who works, the reward is not considered a kindness but in accordance with what is due.' The task of interpretation does not end with a clarification of the meaning of the phrase 'not before God,' but has to proceed to an explanation of what Paul means by it. With the phrase Paul does not deny the truth of the statement in the first part of the verse, but affirms it with the qualification that it does not count before God. Paul's primary purpose in Rm 4 is not polemics against rewards for good works. In verse 4 he reaffirms without qualification rewards that are due for good works, posing against it in verse 5 the person who does not have good works. He then proceeds to prove, first, that Abraham not only did not have good works, that he had been a sinner (vv 6-8), and then, that Abraham had been a gentile when he was justified (vv 9-10).

Paul may not have been altogether successful in his attempt in Rm 4:2 to make his point about Abraham having been justified without works, that is, that his justification had not been as a Jew, and therefore proceeded to try again in verses 3-10. In any case, Rm 4:2 is a step in an argument which Paul completes in verses 3-10. Therefore, one should interpret Rm 4:2 in the light of verses 3-10 where Paul evidently achieved what he had had in mind. His purpose was to prove that Abraham had been a gentile when he was justified, which was in turn his way of proving that God was not only of the Jews, but also of the gentiles (3:29-30). In that case, the point of the first part of Rm 4:2 was probably not primarily works as such, even though it was that too, but works as the qualification of a Jew, as the pride of a Jew. Reading Rm 4:2 in that way suggests that with 'not before God' Paul did not want to disqualify good works as such, but to challenge the Jewish view formulated so well by Josephus: by doing good works, Jews established their 'godliness before our God' (Contra Apion 2.171). The issue is not the value of the godliness described by Josephus, but the privilege it establishes 'before God.'

Taking the argument a step further, by also reading Rm 4:2 in the light of Phlp 3:7, 'what was profitable for me, I have come to consider as a loss for the sake of Christ,' allows a meaning to emerge which agrees with what follows in Rm 4:3-10. These eight verses reaffirm that Rm 4:2 is not a negation, but a qualified affirmation of the value of good works for the Jew, and that Paul's purpose was not to negate the value of good works, but to argue that good works which qualify Jews as righteous fall short of what he found in Christ Jesus.

Taken in this way, Rm 4:2 is not a contradiction of what Paul wrote about justification for the doing of good works in chapter 2, but a denial that Abraham could have been justified 'from works,' that is, as a Jew. In Rm 4:4 Paul reaffirms without qualification the principle of rewarding good works:
"For the person who works, the reward is not considered a kindness, but in accordance with what is due," because he has moved to arguing for the justification of Abraham not only without works, but also (even worse) as a sinner, the justification by faith of the ungodly. Whereas Rm 4:2 denies that Abraham could have been justified as a godly person, verse 5 leaves that issue behind in favor of Abraham's justification as an ungodly person, which Paul proceeds to prove in verses 6-8.

6.2 Galatians 3:11-12

The above understanding of the qualification 'not before God' in Rm 4:2 is supported by Gl 3:11-12. The same meaning as in Rm 4:2 and 4 is expressed in a more complete form in the Galatians passage, 'That no-one is justified before God (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ) through the Law' is clear, because 'the just will live by faith;' the Law is not from faith, but 'the person who does [the commandments] will live by them.' Paul's reasoning in these verses is framed by the argument it serves, namely, that the Jews had been under a curse (v 10) from which Christ freed them by becoming a curse, because it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung from a tree' (v 13). The statement in Gl 3:11, 'through the Law no-one is justified before God,' is semantically parallel to Rm 4:2, 'if Abraham was justified from works, he would have reason to be proud, but not before God.' In Gl 3:11-12 the qualification 'before God' (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ) sets the limits within which 'in the Law no-one is justified' applies. It marks the same boundary as Rm 4:2 in which 'not before God' (οὐ πρὸς θεόν) sets the limits outside of which 'Abraham was justified from works' applies. The phrases παρὰ τῷ θεῷ and πρὸς θεόν are equivalent in meaning, making the two statements complimentary, with Gl 3:11 referring to what does apply before God—faith—and Rm 4:2 what does not—works. In Gl 3:11, Paul does not question the adequacy of doing what the Law requires within its own framework, recognising, even if critically, that 'the person who does [the commandments] will live by them' (v 12b). Living by doing what the Law requires in the sense described by Josephus is not what is at issue: Paul poses over against living by the Law that the just lives by faith, which excludes living by the Law, 'the Law is not from faith' (v 12a). His reasoning here agrees with what he argued in Phlp 3:5-11, as it does with what he would argue again in Rm 4:2, namely, that justification through doing what the Law requires has a validity of its own, but falls short of what is provided by faith.
6.3 Galatians 3:21

The same qualification applies to Gl 3:21d, ‘if a Law with the power to make alive was given, justification would indeed have been through the Law.’ Nowhere else does Paul reveal equal ambivalence about the Law. He wants to provide support for his denial that the Law and the promises are opposed to each other, but obviously wants to avoid the impression that they are equivalent: the Law did not have the power to make alive. Here, in contrast with Rm 3:31, ‘Do we destroy the Law through faith? By no means! We affirm it,’ the Law is set in opposition to the promises. The effect of Paul’s reasoning in Gl 3:21d is that from the vantage point of the Law itself the promises fulfill what is lacking in it. Rm 3:31 supports this understanding from the point of view of faith, ‘Do we destroy the Law through faith? By no means! We affirm it.’

In Gl 3:23-25, Paul affirms the value of the Law as the means of establishing Jewish piety, ‘Before faith came we were guarded by the Law, locked up for the revelation of the coming faith. So the Law became our pedagogue (custodian) to Christ, in order that we could be justified by faith’ (vv 23-24). He evidently contrasts the inability of the Law to give life with what was achieved by the coming of Christ through the justification by faith. And so, ‘with the coming of faith we are no longer under the pedagogue’ (3:25). Here in Gl 3:23-25, therefore, the Law and faith stand in the same relationship to each other as in Phlp 3:7, according to which Paul gave up reliance on the Law for the sake of what he found in Christ Jesus.

Paul is confident that the Law as a pedagogue guarding Jews from falling into gentile ungodliness is now also available to gentiles, as his frequent references to the danger of gentiles falling back into their previous ungodliness reveals. For example, after asking his readers in Rm 6:15, ‘Shall we sin because we are not subject to the Law, but depend on [God’s] favour?’ he contrasts their earlier gentile life with a new life of godliness under the Law, ‘As you offered your limbs to be slaves of impurity and lawlessness for the sake of lawlessness, so now offer your limbs as slaves to justice for the sake of sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from justice’ (vv 19b-20). What Paul sets up as an example for his readers here may not fit well with the self-affirming description of his own perfection as a Jew in Phlp 3:5, but it does fit with Josephus’ description of Jewish godliness in Contra Apion 2.171.

7 THREE SETS OF OPPOSITIONS CONCERNING JUSTIFICATION THROUGH WORKS OF THE LAW

From the above, we may conclude that the contradictions concerning the Law and good works in Paul do not represent contradictions in his thinking
about these matters, but reflect a casualness about the expressions he uses to communicate his thoughts, similar to his inattention to defined meanings in his use of terms like σάρξ (flesh), πίστις (faith, trust), and ἐργον/ἐργα (work[s]), as William Wrede argued a century ago. The expressed meanings reveal a consistent pattern. Compared with terms like σάρξ, πίστις, and ἐργον/ἐργα, however, the language about the Law is more complicated because Paul had in mind a single Law, undifferentiated in his thinking, but differentiated in his expressions. He differentiates the Law as the will of God and the Law as the means of establishing Jewish privilege. He also differentiates the Law, viewed positively, as the basis for God's judgment of all human behavior, Jewish as well as gentile, as in 1 Cor 7:19, Rm 2, 3:27, and 4:4, and the Law, viewed negatively, as the basis for a privileged Jewish identity, as in Gl 3:2-25, and Rm 3:21-4:25. This makes it possible to distinguish three sets of oppositions: between justification through the Law by claiming Jewish privilege and justification by faith; between justification through works of the Law by claiming Jewish privilege and justification through works of the Law as the doing of good works; and between justification through works of the Law as the doing of good works and justification by faith.

1. The irreconcilable opposition between justification through works of the Law in the sense of reliance on a Jewish identity and justification by faith come to expression in statements like, 'the Law is not from faith, but “the person who does [the commandments] will live by them”’ (Gl 3:12); ‘For we consider that a person is justified by faith without works of the Law’ (Rm 3:28), and formulated in terms of the promise to Abraham, ‘For it was not through the Law that the promise was made to Abraham and to his seed that he would be the inheritor of the world, but through the obedience of faith; for if those who are from the Law are inheritors, faith has become empty, and the promise destroyed’ (Rm 4:13-14, cf. 9:31-32, ‘whereas Israel who followed the Law of righteousness did not attain the Law? Why? because it was not by faith, but through works: they stumbled against the stumbling block’). The opposition of justification by faith to justification through works of the Law by claiming Jewish privilege, does not extend to the justification of Jews as such, as Gl 2:15-16b makes clear, ‘We who are by heritage Jews, and not from the gentiles, sinners, knowing that a person is not justified from works

of the Law unless it is through the faith of Jesus Christ, we too believed in Christ Jesus'; also Rm 4:12, '...and the father of the circumcised for those who are not only circumcised, but who also trace the footsteps of the faith while uncircumcised of our father Abraham.' In both of these texts Jews as Jews are justified by faith.

2. In Paul's thinking, justification through works of the Law by claiming Jewish privilege is also irreconcilable with justification through works of the Law as the doing of good works, stated without polemic in 1 Cor 7:19, 'Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God,' but then polemically in Rm 2:13, 'Not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.'

3. On the other hand, justification by faith and through works of the Law in the sense of the doing of good works also stand in opposition to each other, for example, as alternatives in Rm 4:4-5, 'For the person who works, the reward is not considered a favour, but in accordance with what is due; for the person who does not work, but trusts (πιστεύωντι) in him who justifies the ungodly, his [or her] act of trusting (πιστεύω) is reckoned as justice'. Earlier in Rm 3:27 Paul states, 'What then about merit? It is excluded. By which law? That of works? No, but by the law of faith.' In this last text, the ambiguity/multivalence of νόμος is clear. One might translate νόμος here with 'principle' to bring out Paul's intended meaning, but with that we would lose Paul who evidently did not think of νόμος in terms of this distinctive meaning, and that is precisely the problem. He did not think in terms of distinctive meanings in his use of terms like νόμος, and in that way was unable to avoid ambiguity. If he had been philosophically informed he himself might have used a term like 'principle,' for example, λόγος, in which case we could translate Rm 3:27, 'What then about merit? It is excluded. By which principle? That of works? No, but by the principle of faith.'

Justification in these three cases, through works of the Law as the claim to Jewish privilege, through works of the Law as the doing of good works, and through faith, also entails three distinct meanings of the term justification. The kind of justification achieved in each case is determined by the means by which it is achieved. Paul negates the first unequivocally. It is that which he gave up for the sake of what he found in Christ Jesus, stated in sharp focus in Phlp 3:7-9, '...what was profitable for me, I have come to consider as a loss for the sake of Christ. In all events, I consider all to be a loss through the abundance of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, through whom I lost everything, and consider it refuse in order to gain Christ, and to be found in him, not having my own righteousness which is from the Law, but [the justifi-
which is through the faith of Christ, the justification of the believer from God.' Paul's use of justification in this text is unequivocal; it refers to alternatives, the one of which he denies in favour of the other.

Paul's attitude to justification through works of the Law as the doing of good works is ambivalent. Twice he is faced with the irreconcilability of justification through works of the Law in this sense and justification through faith and in both cases he emphatically denied such an irreconcilability: 'The Law is thus against the promises? By no means! For if a Law with the power to make alive was given, justification would indeed have been through the Law' (Gl 3:21), and 'Do we destroy the Law through faith? By no means! We affirm it' (Rm 3:31). His ambivalence about justification through works of the Law in this sense comes to full expression in Rm 4:2, '...if Abraham was justified from works, he would have reason to be proud, but not before God.' Paul was unable to sort out the problem because he was unable to distinguish, or at least to express unambiguously, what the kind of justification was that was provided by faith and not by works, and yet behind his reasoning the distinction can be recognised as valid.

8 JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND THE PROBLEM OF THE LAW: NEW ISSUES IN PHILIPPIANS, GALATIANS AND ROMANS

The texts suggesting that the Law has no power to give life (Gl 3:21), and that good works do not count 'before God' (Rm 4:2), have no parallels in Paul's letters before Galatians and Romans, the letters in which he contested the view that it was necessary to become a Jew in order to be saved. Furthermore, the concept of the justification of the ungodly by faith does not occur in Paul's letters before Rm 4. In the Philippians fragment and in Galatians, justification by faith was of the godly, not the ungodly. Furthermore, justification of the ungodly in Rm 4, the only place where it occurs, was formulated specifically to prove that Abraham had been a gentile when he was justified as the means of proving, in turn, that the God of the Jews was also the God of the gentiles.

From this we may conclude that if it had not been for Galatians and Romans nobody would have thought that Paul had reservations about the efficacy of obedience to the Law as decisive for salvation, and if Paul had not written Rm 4:5 as part of his reasoning to prove that Abraham had been a gentile when he was justified, the idea of the justification of the ungodly by faith would never have been part of Christian thought. Paul most certainly

4 See page 250, above.
did not consider himself ungodly, and he equally certainly expected that his converts would not continue to be ungodly. It is amazing that for centuries in the history of the interpretation of Paul, Rm 4:5, this single, misinterpreted verse, dominated the (mis)understanding of him, theologically and exegetically. Rm 1:18-32 should leave no doubt about Paul’s disgust for the ungodly, irrespective of whether they were Jews or gentiles. It is too easily left unnoticed that his challenge to Peter in Gl 2:14 has an undeniably Jewish religious-ethical basis, ‘you as a Jew live like a gentile and not a Jew.’ In this statement, living like a gentile is equivalent to living immorally, and living like a Jew equivalent to godliness.

9 CONCLUSION

Independently of each other, E P Sanders and Roman Heiligenthal have shown that the expression ἔργα νόμου, ‘works of the Law’ in Paul does not refer to a supposed works righteousness in Judaism. According to Sanders works righteousness was never a feature of Judaism, not even of rabbinic Judaism. Paul’s opposition to works of the Law ‘is not against a supposed Jewish position that enough good works earn righteousness. In the phrase “not by works of law” the emphasis is not on works abstractly conceived but on law, that is, Mosaic law. [Paul’s] argument is that one need not be Jewish to be “righteous” and is thus against the standard Jewish view that accepting and living by the law is a sign and a condition of favoured status.’ Heiligenthal, whose study focused primarily on Galatians, defines works of the Law in Galatians as ‘signs of membership in a group, more precisely, visible signs of belonging to the Jewish people.’ My study of Galatians and Romans, carried out independently of both Sanders and Heiligenthal, confirms their views by arguing that justification by faith in Galatians and Romans does not stand in irreconcilable opposition to works righteousness, but refers to the justification of the gentiles in Paul’s opposition to what he perceived to have been an understanding of justification that was limited to the Jews, the circumcised, those who were under the Law.

5 Rm 4:6 does not refer to the justification of the ungodly by faith, but to Christ having died for the ungodly.


8 Sanders, Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People, 46.

9 Heiligenthal, Werke als Zeichen 128, cf 127-34.

With regard to the issue of Judaism and the church in Paul's thought we may draw the following conclusions from the above study:

1. The value attached to the doing of good works in Romans 2 is characteristic of Paul's thought throughout his letters, including his use of obedience to the Law as an argument in Rm 2:25-29 to prove that the external act of circumcision and submission to the Law did not count before God, a conception which finds similar expression in 1 Cor 7:19, 'Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God.'

2. That Paul did not only value the doing of good works, the doing of God's commandments, but also expected that everyone would be answerable before the throne of God for what he or she did. This finds unequivocal expression in 1 Cor 3:13-15, 'The work of each will become public—the day will lay it bare—for it will be revealed by fire; fire will test what the work of each is like. If the work which someone built (on the foundation) remains, he (or she) will receive his (or her) reward. If the work of someone is burnt, he (or she) will have lost, but he himself (she herself) will be saved, but as if through fire.'

3. Paul's statements concerning righteousness through works of the Law are not without contradictions. For example, there is a contradiction between the statements in Gl 3:21 that the Law did not have the power which leads to life, and in Rm 2:7 that 'those who seek glory and honour and immortality through the patience of good works (will receive) eternal life.'

4. Justification by faith is a concept which appears only in Paul's latest writings, that is, the Philippians fragment, Galatians and Romans. It cannot be considered as a fundamental principle in all of his thinking.

5. Even though Paul opposed Judaising the gentiles by having them circumcised, he himself adhered to an uncompromising form of moral Judaising. Gentile believers were no longer gentiles, as he states explicitly in 1 Cor 12:2, 'You remember, when you were gentiles you went off as you were led to the dumb idols,' and in Rm 6:19b he contrasts the previous 'lawless' life of his gentile readers with the kind of life he holds before them now that they have become united in Christ, 'As you offered your limbs to be slaves of impurity and lawlessness for the sake of lawlessness, so now offer your limbs as slaves to justice for the sake of sanctification.'

An important further conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that unless Paul is interpreted as a Jew who became a believer, and continued to be a Jew who had become a believer, and not as Christian who had once been a Jew, no real progress will be made in understanding him especially
with regard to the issues of the Law and faith, but also beyond those issues. The difference can become clear when one compares 1 Cor 7:19, ‘Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God,’ and Mt 7:21, ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one who does the will of my father who is in the heavens.’ These two, among the greatest of the New Testament writers, agree fundamentally that what counts supremely is keeping the commandments of God, doing the will of God. What distinguishes them is that Matthew formulates the issue from the point of view of a Christian, ‘[whoever] says to me, “Lord, Lord,”’ whereas Paul formulates it from a Jewish point of view, ‘Circumcision is nothing and not being circumcised is nothing.’

Inside the dust cover of Justification of the gentiles Daniel Patte wrote, '[Paul's] anti-Jewish message is conveyed by Paul's letters. When it is ignored, as it traditionally is, this message nevertheless haunts readers and feeds anti-Semitism.' Maybe it is now possible to take Patte's statement against anti-Semitism a step further. As long as Paul is interpreted as belonging solely to the church, his thoughts will continue to feed anti-Semitism. What should now become clear is that, as it was possible for Vermes to claim Jesus also for Judaism without challenging the Christian claim, Paul can similarly, and maybe even more decisively, form a bridge between Judaism and the church, belonging at the depths of his experience and thought to both. In many ways he can be understood better as a Jewish sectarian (in the sense of Acts 24:14) than as a Christian. He never uses the term Christian, and should be understood in his own terms as a believer. That he was a Jewish sectarian finds clear expression in his understanding that the Jews can be saved only if 'they do not persist in their unbelief' (Rm 11:23). Romans 9-11 should leave no doubt that he understood the religious developments in which he was involved not as the beginnings of a new religion, but as having taken place within the framework of a sect in Judaism.

Integral to Paul's identity as a believing Jew was his understanding of the continued validity of the Law. For the church, especially the Protestant church, acceptance of this feature of his thought could prove beneficial for Christian ethics, providing it with a foundation in which faith and works are not perceived as mutually exclusive but as opposed principles in a relationship in which each functions as a factor in defining the meaning of the other. Rm 3:27 and 31 might serve as a model: 'What then about pride? It is

excluded. By what law? The law of works? No but by the law of faith... Do we then destroy the law through faith? By no means! We affirm it.'

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